

Interview Summary – New Mexico Environment Department

DRAFT - DELIBERATIVE

December 9; Draft Final Summary

Interviewers: Eric Mosher, David Kluesner

Date: December 9, 2015

Time: 0900-1000 MST

Tom Skibitski, Resource Protection Division of the New Mexico Environment Department was interviewed on December 9, 2015, as part of an internal EPA After-Action review of the Agency's response to the release at Gold King Mine in Colorado on August 5, 2015.

Ronnie Crossland (R6) and Monica Smith (R6) participated in the interview by phone.

Notifications facts and observations:

- New Mexico Env. Dept. learned about spill in enough time to take action. NM Resource Protection went to Drinking Water Bureau and asked who is using the river and they (Drinking Water Bureau) did notifications.
- Things went well.
- Big concern was that R8 wasn't really forthcoming of the scale (they were either unsure of the scale or it did not occur to R8 to notify people downstream).
- Perhaps people thought it would dilute and not be visible downstream?
- R8 probably should have called NM to notify ASAP

Incident Command facts and observations:

- Trying to get real time info from R8 was difficult.
- Unified Command was not visible until a week into the incident.
- On the ground in the EOC in Aztec, NM things went well.
- Communicated clearly with each other on the local level. R6 followed ICS format well. Regular updates and made resources available.
- Trying to get info from CO was hard, they seemed unwilling to share.
- Was apparent to NM that R8 was not communicating with R6. Also disappointed in how the three regions did not integrate well.
- Planning and Logistics in Aztec were amazing.
- High profile events bring out high profile people, which may not be best for the incident.

- EPA told NM that all decisions would be based on science. But then scientific responses would have to go through Washington for approval. Some contradiction there.

Data and Information Management facts and observations:

- People want data immediately.
- Some of data came out in PDF format, which is useless.
- Some data results were reported as “non-detect”. Rather than report as non-detect, put in the numbers that the machine spit out (e.g., even if the value is a negative number). This shows respect for peers. EPA should let the state counterparts have the spreadsheet with the raw data. Waiting until all the data is validated and cleared and vetted by chief scientist is too long.
- New Mexico first saw Excel spreadsheets dated August 9. First hard numbers (preliminary results) were available on August 10 (metals).
- People got emotional over getting data six days after the event. Too long of a wait.
- In a past fire incident (Las Conchas fire in NM in 2011), NM was able to access a shared database to see the raw data. They could see and understand that it was raw data. Would be great/ideal to see all raw data being pumped into a database. One place for everything.
- Quality of Sit Rep beginning Aug 30 (Sit Rep #19) was great format. Prior to that they were not as consistent.

Public Affairs:

- Local PIO (Michelle) in San Juan County did a great job. Extension Agent Bonnie Hopkins was a great way to leverage resources.
- Local public meetings were held. The frequency was good. Planning and access to Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) and operational people was handled well. Kim Carpenter (San Juan County Administrator) was great. Having all the SMEs sit on the panel at public meetings was a great approach. EPA contributed to this. People on panel had first hand knowledge.
- Public outreach handled well.
- GKM website used only to pull down data. Not sure if NM got noticed on when EPA posted new information to the EPA GKM website.
- Would like EPA to address better the hysteria, e.g., by the time the pulse reached Lake Powell it was non detectable. EPA should have put that message out there better.
- Dr. David Charter, with HQ ERT, was in NM, he was amazing.

Data and Information Management Recommendations:

- EPA should let the state counterparts have the data spreadsheets with the raw data. Waiting until all the data is validated and cleared and vetted by chief scientist is too long. Rather than report as non-detect, put in the numbers that the machine spit out (e.g., even if the value is a negative number). This shows respect for peers.
- Look at how the Las Conchas fire in NM in 2011 was handled. Would be great/ideal to see all raw data being pumped into a database. One place for everything.

Communications Recommendations:

- Having all the Subject Matter Experts sit on a panel at public meetings was a great approach. EPA contributed to this. People on panel had first-hand knowledge.